



A Journey Down Surplus Street

PART II: SUCCESS, SECRETS & SODOM

By DEORA BABIN KATZ



In part one of our series, we learned of the earliest times of Surplus Street, one of Duxbury's oldest pathways. We were introduced to the area's first settlers, Peter Brown, Henry Howland and Henry Samson, and discovered how the history of this pathway goes even further back to the times of the Native American. Now, as we journey down Surplus Street, stopping at its well-preserved homes, we will learn more about the people who worked and resided here. We will uncover family genealogies, and a variety of architectural philosophies. A pathway can be more than just a means of egress. It can lead us to family secrets, fascinating stories, and a wealth of town history, which once uncovered can draw and delight us for centuries.

-- D. B. Katz

Benjamin Bosworth House 4 Surplus Street

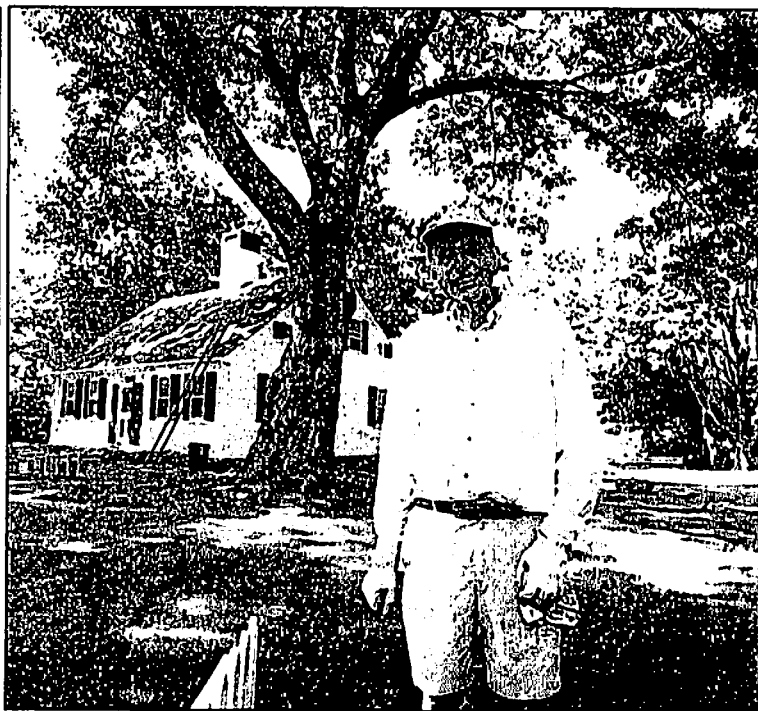
First in on our journey down Surplus Street is the Benjamin Bosworth House which sits facing south onto this once ancient cart path. You must picture this house without Washington Street running along the right side. When Bosworth built his lovely federal style home, Washington Street had not yet been built. It came into existence in 1798 and was first called Main Street.

The history of this residence begins well before the foundation was laid. It starts with Ebenezer Delano, known as Old King Ehen, whose farm covered a large track of land that extended from Surplus Street, crossing over what would eventually become

Washington Street to the bay. In August 1794, Benjamin Bosworth purchased this house lot from Delano, who "towards the end of his long life sold his farm in bits and pieces," noted Dorothy Wentworth, a former town historian.

Bosworth married Mercy Prior in September 1791. Then in 1794, the couple moved into the house lovingly built by Benjamin

himself who was a house carpenter by trade. At the time they had two children, Abigail and Benjamin. Many more children would be born in the federal home, in the small bedroom off the center kitchen known as the burning room. It appears Bosworth was quite successful as a carpenter and was able to purchase the



Current homeowner Bill Riegel maintaining the Joseph S. Thomas House built in 1824. Tree in back is reported to be one of Duxbury's oldest living trees.

Photo by Michelle Babin

land and build a substantial home for his wife and children.

The two-story house has some special details to its architectural design. While the floor plan is consistent with other federal style homes of this period, Bosworth added a "mini-ell," which included the kitchen's large hearth fireplace and beehive stove instead of

locating it in the central chimney as was the tradition for this style house.

"It puts the builder apart from the general run of house carpenters," noted Wentworth.

Then in 1822, Bosworth sold the house and land to the Sampson brothers, Job, Henry and William all merchants in Duxbury for the handsome price of \$1,180. Only Henry resided in the house. The brothers were quite industrious, successful men who maintained a wharf, store, and trading business. The store they operated was located just north of the Bosworth lot.

From 1834 to 1868, Ezra Weston owned the Bosworth house. During the height of the shipbuilding industry, the home operated as a boarding house for those employed in the business.

The corner where Surplus Street intersects Washington Street was once known as 'Hell's Corner.' Duxbury residents called the area 'Sodom,' or 'where the wicked people lived.'

The nickname appears to have been well deserved as the respectable women and girls of Duxbury always requested "escorts" whenever they needed to walk near this section of Surplus Street.

"Not all of those who came to work in the thriving community were a credit to town... a brawling, hard-drinking crew gave a bad name to the shore

settlement," noted Wentworth.

Later the house was converted into a two family home. During the 1890s the house became a summer inn called *The Cottage by the Sea*, converting it from a boarding place for the brawling ship workers to a tranquil summer residence for the highly respectable.

Joseph S. Thomas House 14 Surplus Street

Walking by this lovely traditional cape with its two additional back ells and beautiful landscape (including one of Duxbury's oldest trees), a visitor would never expect that this house is part of an unsolved mystery. A mystery, which has never been solved by researcher or historian, and is likely to remain a family secret forever buried with Major Thomas, his wife Betsy, and his father-in-law Bradford Holmes.

In 1824 Bradford Holmes, a block maker by trade, bought this lot of land most likely as a wedding gift for his oldest daughter Betsy who planned to marry Major Joseph S. Thomas.

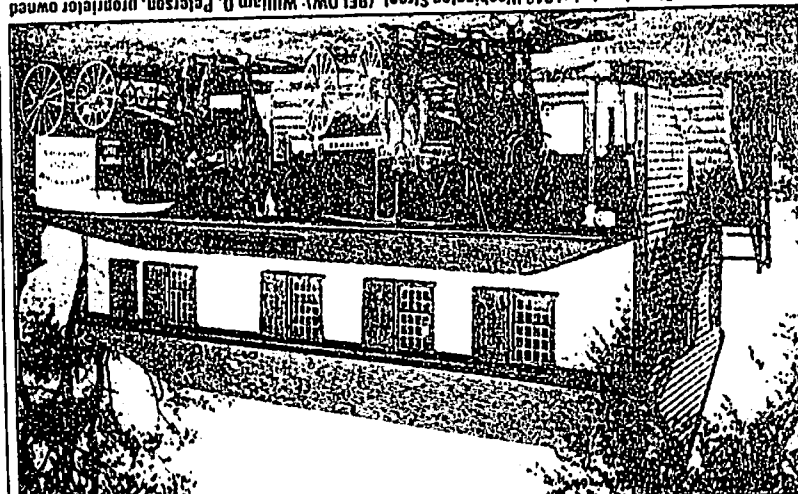
"Thomas was a veteran of the Mexican War, and (the couple) went to live in a new house he had built on his father-in-law's lot," noted Wentworth.

The house was conveniently located near Holmes' house at 32 Surplus Street, allowing the families to be near each other, and Holmes to see his daughter and future grandchildren.



The Benjamin Bosworth House was once a boarding house for brawling shipworkers.

Photo by Michelle Babin



(TOP): Peterson Store located at 318 Washington Street. (BELOW): William O. Peterson, proprietor owned the Joseph S. Thomas House on Surplus Street for twenty five years.

Thomas quickly added a large kitchen across the rear, either side of the front hall, flanked by 2 small rooms," noted Wentworth.

Holmes, who had maintained ownership of the lot all along, purchased from his son-in-law the dwelling house.

"It seemed like an ideal situation, new house, promising business, family near, but something went wrong," Wentworth wrote.

Within two years of living in their new home and one month after the birth of their first son, George, Thomas picked up and left for a new home in Duxbury.

Thomas sold the buildings - house and shop - to his father-in-law Bradford Holmes who still retained ownership of the land.

"Not even in family stories has there been any reason given for the sudden sale of the new house," said Wentworth.

As records show, Betsy remained in her father's will, but the couple never moved back, leaving what appeared to be an ideal place to raise a family and run a business. The mystery remains unsolved, but the house reveals a well-constructed Cape whose large center chimney still maintains 6 working fireplaces.

"The rooms are in the usual arrangement with 2 front rooms



blacksmith shop and coal house built by Thomas for \$400. The part of the lot and dwelling then turned around and sold north of the house. Eventually he would purchase the business naming it "The Peterson Store."

Most of the exterior of the main house remains in fact as it did when Major Thomas built it for his new bride in 1824.

The hand-hewn and sawn timbers of its frame endure while Betsy and Joseph's early abandonment of their lovely home and family business remain a secret and mystery to all.

Next in our series, we will visit a home which has remained in the same family since 1820 as we journey down one of Duxbury's oldest pathways.

Jonathan Gross made coffee for a living. "A prosperous business, but one wonders how it was so profitable when a coffee then sold for \$8," added Wentworth.

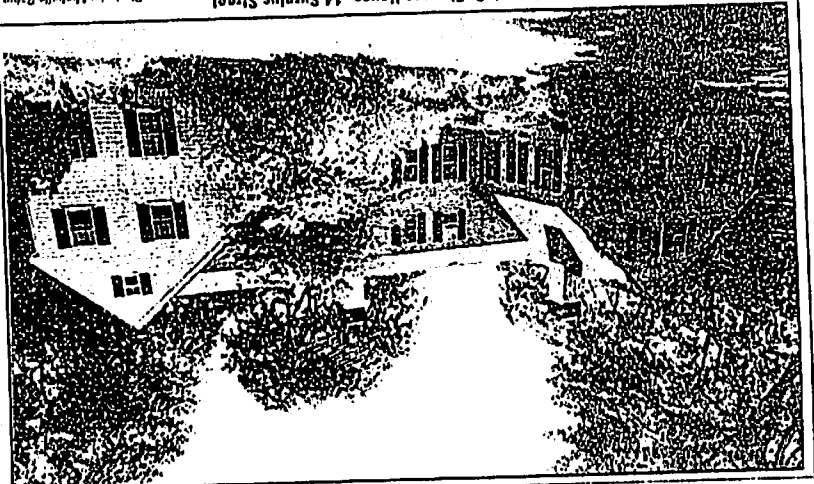
It would be Gross who built the additions to the house, including an older building for a new ell kitchen. This kitchen boasted a large fireplace and hearth, which included a brick

Peterson worked as a storekeeper in the local store just north of the house. Eventually he would purchase the business naming it "The Peterson Store."

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The Joseph S. Thomas House, 14 Surplus Street. Photo by Abigail Gann